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THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE.¹

It need scarcely be said that a fairly large literature, in a special sense of the term, has of late grown up around the question how literature in general should be taught. Whole books have been devoted to it, and the number of articles concerning it is very great. I myself have written three such papers; but it is a subject that admits of much discussion, and I suppose that I am not exceptional in finding myself dissatisfied, in the light of accumulating experience, with much of my past theorizing and writing. For this reason, if for no other, I should like to examine the matter afresh.

To do this, we must reason from the bottom up; and we shall require working definitions of our two terms, "literature" and "teaching." No one has yet succeeded in defining "literature," but it is generally understood that when used in connection with schools and colleges, to a less extent with universities and the general reading public, the term literature is narrowed by the exclusion of books that have little or no æsthetic value. In other words, only the books which through their subject-matter or their style or through both please us to a certain extent—that is, affect our emotions in a more or less agreeable way—are counted as constituting "literature" in our sense of the term. These agreeable books are mainly differentiated through the fact that they are full of that indefinable something which we call "imagination"—that is to say, they usually fall under the categories of poetry and fiction. It is furthermore evident not merely that masses of books, useful for various purposes, but not capable of giving much or any æsthetic pleasure, are excluded from literature, but that perhaps as many more are excluded because they have comparatively ceased to please and are no longer literature for us. In other words, time does part of our winnowing for us—the teaching of literature means really the teaching, not of once popular, but of classic books,

¹The substance of a public lecture delivered during the summer session of Columbia University, July, 1902.

and, in a few cases, of such contemporary books as seem to possess qualities likely to make them classic.

But what does the term "teaching" mean when applied to a subject that involves our emotional natures? Here is really the *crux* of our problem. Do we understand that for us to teach shall mean to inculcate, or that it shall mean to impart pleasure, or that it shall mean to instruct, or that it shall mean all three? If we emphasize the idea of inculcation, we must obviously intend to give ourselves up chiefly to what I have elsewhere termed *teaching the spirit of literature*—to inculcating the higher and the lower virtues of humanity that are in various ways illustrated in the classical writings of our own literature and of foreign literatures. For example, we shall use Lowell's odes in order to inculcate the virtue of patriotism.

If we emphasize the idea of imparting delight, we must intend to give ourselves up to the task of training the æsthetic faculties of our pupils so that they may more fully appreciate the beauties of literature and learn more and more to take pleasure in the choicest books. For example, we shall use Lowell's odes in order to impart and develop the delight that the trained ear receives from choice diction and harmonious rhythm. For many of us it is of course impossible to avoid combining inculcation of the humane virtues with this imparting of æsthetic delight, but it is possible greatly to emphasize the latter function of the teacher, since the giving of æsthetic pleasure is held by not a few critics to be the main if not the sole reason for the existence of literature.

If, on the other hand, we emphasize the idea of instruction, we must obviously intend to give ourselves up, in the main, to teaching the facts of literature—that is, to dwelling upon literary history and biography, to laying stress on names and dates and periods, to tracing literary influences, to studying the evolution of a special form of composition; for example, the drama. In brief, if we use literature as matter for inculcation, we teachers of it must, in part at least, take our stand with the preachers, the moralists; and if as a means of imparting delight, with the apostles of æsthetic culture; if, on the contrary,

we use literature as matter for instruction, we must take our place with our friends who endeavor to convey a knowledge of the facts of language, of history, of economics, of the natural sciences.

But I doubt if there are many teachers of literature who do not endeavor to combine the methods involved in the phrases, to impart delight, to inculcate, and to instruct. They use Lowell's odes to inculcate the virtue of patriotism, and to impart and develop æsthetic pleasure; but they also give instruction with regard to the facts of Lowell's life and of American history that explain how and why he came to write his odes, and to fill them with the patriotic spirit. Yet this does not get us so far away from our *crux* as we may imagine. The question of the proportions of inculcation and æsthetic training to be blended with one another and with instruction still remains to perplex us, and we are still confronted with the more difficult and certainly the more practical question of how we shall test the value of the instruction we convey. If we are to have our classes recognized as integral parts of the school or college curriculum, we must either hold our examinations and make our reports, as our friends—I will not call them rivals—do, or we must adopt other methods of advancing and graduating our students and must satisfy our fellow-teachers that we are not merely giving what are technically known in college slang as "snap courses." I suppose my own experience has been that of many in this matter. I have detected among my friends engaged in other forms of instruction a tendency to question the strictness, the mental discipline, the definite, tangible qualities of the work done in school and college classes devoted to the study of literature. Certainly this is the case with respect to English and other modern literatures; the literatures of Greece and Rome, having so long been used as material for philological studies, have been less questioned on the score of the strictness of the mental discipline derived from instruction in them, but have not escaped censure on the score of general utility. I do not believe that the doubts of these critical teachers are unnatural, or that they will be removed unless we succeed in doing

one of two things. We must either impart such rigidity to our tests of the amount and quality of our instruction as shall make it obvious that our classes are as difficult to pass as those of any teacher of another branch of study; or we must by a clear analysis of the theory of the teaching and study of literature convince all other educators, and perhaps the public as well, that, while literature is as important a study as any other and must be included in any good school, college, or university curriculum, the methods of teaching it are of necessity fundamentally different from those employed in other studies and warrant a great departure from the normal tests of instruction.

Has any one made such an analysis of the theory of the teaching of literature as clearly sets that study apart from all others? If any one has, I have not seen it. On the other hand, has any one succeeded in imparting such rigidity to the methods of teaching literature and testing the instruction conveyed as to make it plain that literature is as difficult and important a study as any other? I have no doubt that many persons have done this, at least so far as concerns the matter of difficulty. I have done it myself and can engage to pitch anybody else or to get pitched myself in an indefinite series of examinations. But, while we are imparting rigidity to our instruction, are we not in constant danger of forgetting our work of inculcation and of æsthetic training? Are we not further haunted by the thought that an extremely large proportion of the facts about literature that we make our pupils learn must be speedily forgotten by them and can in few cases do them any direct good?

I confess I have been haunted by this thought for nearly fifteen years. Ever since I had certain answers given me, which I am fond of repeating, I have doubted the great value of instruction not merely in the facts of literary history and biography, but in minute verbal exegesis. Ever since a student, remembering that *cynosure* is derived from the Greek for dog's tail, commented on the beautiful lines of "L'Allegro,"

Where perhaps some beauty lies,
The cynosure of neighboring eyes,

to the effect that they had something to do with a dog, I have been skeptical of the utility of much of the teaching that we feel obliged to examine upon. I have also been skeptical of many of the other tests of memory to which unfortunate children have been and are subjected—for example, of the tests of memory required of them in geography and grammar; but in geography and grammar the use of maps and examples helps the memory, whereas in literature there is little support given to the memory save by a comparatively few specimens of poetry and prose read in class and in private. Surely our brethren who teach the sciences have in their laboratories, in their experiments, a great advantage over us who can seldom bring our students into sufficient contact with the body of that literature about the history and minute details of which we propose to examine them more or less strictly.

But some one may say, "You are behind the times." Literature used to be taught from manuals and other dry-as-dust compilations, but now we use carefully selected and edited texts, we have school libraries, we make our pupils do a considerable amount of outside reading. We require them to study up special topics and write essays upon them—in other words, we use "laboratory methods."

So be it; yet I fancy that I have had a fair opportunity of watching the development of English instruction in this country. I can go back to the day when a little English grammar and a weekly composition or recitation of a poem constituted the English work of many a well-regulated school. I can recollect when specific English chairs were first established in large universities. I well remember the leading features of English instruction during the decade from 1880 to 1890. It was almost entirely philological. Young doctors from German universities were returning in large numbers, the Johns Hopkins University was initiating German methods, and as a result it was difficult anywhere in the United States to secure specifically literary instruction. The text-books used in school and college alike were filled with notes tracing the history of words, but were singularly lacking, not merely in anything that would

stimulate a pupil's love of literature, but often in anything that would give him an adequate idea of the place in literary history held by the author and book he was studying. The well-known Clarendon Press Shakespeare texts for school and college use remain as a monument of this unliterary—I will not say illiterate—period of our teaching of English.

Late in the eighties and early in the nineties came the inevitable reaction—a small crusade against the neglect of literature in the universities and schools. The result was soon apparent. Philologists began to desire to prove themselves to be experts in literature as well, and issued some queer text-books. Specific chairs of literature were established, and soon some colleges and universities “ran to” literature, just as others, ten years before, had “run to” philology. The change was even more marked in the schools. Classes in English literature were added to the curriculum, and a series of English classics was selected on which examinations for entrance into college were based. Latter-day school-teachers know the woes and the blessings attendant upon teaching those English classics better than I do, since, when I taught in schools, English literature was scarcely recognized as a fit subject of instruction—at least in the South.

But has this movement of the past ten years been as much of an advance as some of us who tried to help it on fondly imagined it would be? Are teachers of literature in possession of methods of teaching comparable in applicability and precision to those of other teachers? Are the pupils they teach satisfactorily trained? Is literature as a subject of instruction really on a par with other subjects of instruction?

To these questions varying answers will of course be given. I myself do not doubt that we have progressed, although I do doubt whether we have made much advance. I suspect that our methods are still very faulty, not merely because literature is a difficult subject to teach, but because we have not thoroughly analyzed our purposes or our means. I scarcely believe that literature, in spite of the increased attention given to it, is on a par with other subjects of instruction. And I even ven-

ture to question whether the average boy or girl goes to college with much more knowledge and love of literature than was the case before they were drilled and examined in the redoubtable "English Classics." Observe that I do not question that our public schools have done a most useful work in bringing into some contact with literature masses of children who a generation ago would have been left without that refining influence upon their lives. What I doubt is whether the generation now entering college, after a course of literature in the schools, is much better off, so far as a love and a knowledge of literature are concerned, than my own generation was with practically no training in the subject. The present generation, if it has been properly trained, ought to be a good deal better off; but while it is certainly a most athletic generation, to the muscular strength and dexterity of which I willingly doff my hat, it has not succeeded in making me feel that it knows much more about Shakespeare and Milton and Byron and Shelley than we benighted youngsters did over twenty years ago. Perhaps, however, more football and baseball have neutralized the effects of more training in literature.

But what I am mainly concerned with is the question from which I have wandered away—the question whether we teachers of literature can safely make our methods as rigid as those of other teachers, and, if we cannot, whether we can convince our brother teachers of the sciences and the semi-sciences that our methods must be radically different from theirs. This question with regard to rigidity of methods is an old one. The late Professor Freeman, the historian, violently opposed the establishment of a chair of literature at Oxford. "We cannot examine," he said, "in tastes and sympathies." To which Mr. Churton Collins replied: "No, examine in the *Poetics*, in the *Rhetoric*, in Quintilian's *Institutes*, in the *De Sublimitate*, in the *Laocoon*, and examine with the object of testing the results of such discipline." This was an excellent answer so far as postgraduate classes in criticism were concerned; but, as I pointed out over ten years ago in this *REVIEW*, Mr. Collins did very little to help school and college teachers of

literature. These have to examine in *Comus* and *The Merchant of Venice*, not in Aristotle, Longinus, and Lessing. They do examine in the former, and, with the aid of the notes learned editors furnish, the examinations set may be made rigid enough to satisfy the most censorious critic. But at once we are thrown on the other horn of our dilemma. Do we not sacrifice the spirit of literature while we are examining on the letter, or rather training our poor children so that they may stand some other person's examination on the letter? As the dread day comes around, do teachers find themselves and their classes reading with rapt interest the noble speeches of Portia, or are they busy with the date of the play, with some critic's opinion with regard to Portia's womanliness, with the names and dates of actual women lawyers and law teachers in Italy, with the sources of the caskets incident; and similar matters only too dear to examiners?

I do not know how others feel about the matter, but I know that after about two years' firm grasping of the rigid horn of the dilemma, if I may so express myself, I began gradually to swing myself over to the other horn—to what I may call the flexible horn. I began to doubt the value of strenuous examinations and to appreciate more and more the necessity of trying to inculcate in my students some of the high moral and spiritual truths taught by great writers, and to impart to them a taste for reading, a love of the best literature. In order to achieve this result, even to a slight extent (and a slight success is all that I think any teacher should dare to hope for), I found that I must do much less instructing—much less questioning with regard to the facts of literary history—and that I must do far more reading of authors than talking about them. I found also that it seemed advisable, in a college at least, to make a distinction between the younger and the older students—to treat the younger ones somewhat as I should treat high-school pupils, the older ones somewhat as I should treat postgraduate students. With the latter I adopted methods which need not be discussed here; with the former, methods which, if sound, should, it seems to me, be shared in the main by all teachers of literature in schools;

for if our American college is anything, it is a halfway house, or station, between the high school and the university. In consequence, it should begin by continuing in considerable measure the methods of teaching used in the schools, and it should gradually change these methods so as to make them lead up to those of the university proper.

But my new treatment of my younger students led to some important results. Reading so much to them myself and giving them so much outside reading to do left no time for the study of a formal manual of literary history. As a text-book of that sort does little good if used by the pupil alone, it followed that I had to reduce the study of the history of literature to a minimum. I finally required the reading of Stopford Brooke's excellent "Primer of English Literature," but did not examine on it. I knew well enough that I was making a sacrifice on the side of exact knowledge, but it seemed to me it had to be made. There were other sacrifices requisite. I like to criticise, I like to theorize, and I have my favorite authors, some of whom are not specially suited to the comprehension and needs of young people. I found that only the most general and obvious kind of criticism was possible under my new system, that much theorizing was out of the question, and that often the books I should never have thought of taking down from my shelves for my own delectation were precisely the ones I ought to take down for the delectation and profit of my students. In other words, I found out by bitter experience that the teacher must sacrifice to his students his personal preferences, his prejudices, his time, almost everything except his enthusiasm and other traits that make him a real individual. A mere repeater of other people's thoughts, a man or woman who has no standards, no decided points of view, will of course fail as a teacher, but so I think will the man or woman who is not willing to sacrifice prejudices and preferences, and to sympathize with the tastes and needs of students. I will illustrate my meaning by a concrete incident. I had an excellent assistant once, to whom, however, I had to give one mild scolding. I happened to overhear him one day making fun of Scott's poetry to a class

of boys few of whom were over seventeen. Neither that assistant nor myself was at the age when "The Lady of the Lake" is a surpassing delight, but those boys were, and I expostulated with that assistant. He could scarcely have acted more fatuously than to ridicule Scott, unless he had done what I myself had been guilty of a few years before—to wit, ridiculing Longfellow. Longfellow with all his merits is—well, perhaps sometimes not far from fatuous, but that teacher is far more fatuous who emphasizes Longfellow's fatuity to school children and college students. It is scarcely necessary to say that teaching should almost invariably be positive rather than negative in character. It should bring out the merits of the book studied rather than its defects. It should aim to develop in children a catholic taste for everything that is good in literature, rather than to encourage prejudices, although a prejudice in favor of an author or a book should be dealt with cautiously. In other words, the good teacher of literature must have many of the qualifications requisite to a good critic—he must be sympathetic, healthy in his tastes, sound in his judgments, and fairly well read.

But the teacher who devotes himself mainly to wide and sympathetic reading with his classes, who rarely instructs but continually endeavors by direct and indirect means to inculcate humane virtues and develop æsthetic tastes—in other words, to instill into his pupils a love of the books that illustrate those virtues and exercise those tastes—must be prepared to make other sacrifices. He must be prepared, as I have said, to sink his own preferences for special books and to use such as will best suit his pupils. He must also be willing to rely on his own judgment rather than on the judgments of others, even of omniscient college professors. If the annotated texts furnished him do not produce the best results, he must eschew their use. Personally I have found such texts occasionally valuable, but I prefer Palgrave's "Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics" to any annotated text I ever used, and that delightful book I need scarcely say is one that every teacher should be glad to take down from his shelves for his own enjoyment.

But the teacher must often make a sacrifice of part of what may be called his technical equipment. Most of us are trained to question our students systematically and to make use of the tests furnished by oral and written examinations. Yet I do not see, any more than Professor Freeman did, how the teacher can examine on tastes and sympathies, how he can ask questions about the humane virtues, without running great risk of making his students prigs, and himself—what shall I say?—a canting Pharisee? Perhaps that is too strong—let me say a plain fool. I believe it to be very foolish to make young people self-conscious with regard to spiritual and æsthetic things by insisting upon their talking and writing about them. It is still more foolish to think that one can satisfactorily mark and grade their answers on such topics.

But some one may ask: "Can we not examine on the facts we instruct in, and require essays on the spiritual and æsthetic matters we inculcate and impart? By means of a combination of marks for diligence and interest shown in class work, for success in written examinations, and for ability displayed in the composition of themes and essays can we not grade our pupils in a thoroughly satisfactory manner?"

So far as marks for diligence and interest in class work are concerned, I fancy that no school superintendent or principal or fellow-teacher in another study will deny that a good teacher of literature is able to grade his pupils satisfactorily. So far as advancement in school or college is dependent upon such grading, which is itself dependent upon the judgment of the individual teacher, I cannot see that literature stands on a markedly different footing from other studies. With regard to examinations on the facts of literary history and biography, I suppose their disciplinary value is not greatly less than that of examinations in many other topics. Their value as a means to store the mind with useful and available knowledge is more questionable, and, although literature means much to me personally, I am obliged to confess that I doubt whether it is not outranked by most other studies as a body of useful and available knowledge. As matters stand, teachers must examine in

it. The colleges require entrance examinations and will continue for some time to require them—whether or not a few unfashionable people like myself think they have made too much of a fetich of their written tests. The colleges not only require examinations, but have, I think, far too much to do with determining the subjects and the range of those examinations, and the methods by which teachers shall prepare their pupils to stand them. Surely in such matters the teacher is often better informed than the college professor, and should be heard from more than he is. But it will take a very authoritative body of teachers and professors combined to make me revise my opinion as to the general worthlessness to all parties concerned of the examinations now set on the so-called English classics—which sometimes are not classics at all, and as usually presented are more suggestive of the tool carpenters call a bore than they are of that delightful something we call literature.

I gladly admit that probably the required examinations on English texts have done good in making room for the study of English literature in schools, and that as a temporary expedient the establishment of the system was warranted. But I think that a radical change in the methods of preparing boys and girls for college is called for—so far at least as English is concerned—since I doubt whether the examinations in literature now help the colleges or the school-teachers greatly, and I suspect they help the unfortunate pupils still less. I doubt if any of us knows so clearly as the teacher of mathematics does, for example, in his specialty, what amount of knowledge of literary history and biography, and of metrical, linguistic, and rhetorical facts needed in literary studies, a freshman should possess on entering college. I doubt whether any of us can be truly said to be very sapient with regard to the best methods of conveying this unknown minimum of instruction—for that there should be *some* instruction in these matters is clear—and I also doubt whether most of the instruction we do attempt does not frequently act as a deterrent from the true comprehension and enjoyment of literature. I will even go

so far as to say that at present I should prefer to admit to college on positive tests in composition, rhetoric, and grammar—in other words, on tests relating to the use of the vernacular—and on the statement by the teacher that the pupil had done a wide amount of reading under direction.

For it is wide reading that best develops any native love of literature, that is most likely to bring out a latent love for it, and that not infrequently leads to the attainment of a greater knowledge of the facts of literary history and biography than is often attained through cut-and-dried methods of instruction. It is a lack of fairly wide reading on the part of students and a certain inflexibility of taste resulting from narrow reading and faulty literary instruction that hamper me more than anything else in teaching college classes. It is this same lack of wide reading that chiefly discourages postgraduate students during the first year of their university course and that renders so many of their dissertations jejune and amateurish. I grant that the school and college curriculums are so crowded that it is almost unfair to expect of pupils and students as much general reading as was done by my contemporaries; but I believe that if all the school classics were annotated for reading instead of study, and if examinations in literature in school or college were either done away with or minimized, the time saved might be profitably employed in reading. The amount and quality of this reading could be at least fairly tested—not so well, perhaps, by concrete questions, which might be anticipated by the pupil, as by the intelligence with which certain passages were read aloud. This would not of course be a conclusive test. The bright pupil willing to be dishonest could easily pretend to have read more than he had done; but is any test that can be devised sufficiently flexible to catch bright dishonest pupils without being unfair to less bright and more honest ones?

Whether now the school authorities would be satisfied to admit to the curriculum classes in which no examinations were held, even if the colleges waived literature as an entrance examination subject, is a point on which I have no data for forming an opinion. I should think, however, that a fairly satisfactory

system of grading could be built up on marks for diligence, which are in the nature of conduct marks, and on the time spent on reading in class as well as on the hours presumably covered by the outside reading. Such a system of grading could also take into account the character of the reading aloud done by the pupil, and on the intelligence displayed in this, on the general diligence vouched for by the teacher, and on the time devoted to reading by the pupil I should imagine that all questions relating to advancement could be determined satisfactorily to parents, principals, and fellow-teachers. Such satisfaction would naturally depend upon all parties concerned being made to see clearly that rigid examinations and other tests in literary studies not only do little positive good, but are really harmful as lessening the teacher's opportunities to inculcate and train rather than to instruct, and as boring pupils and putting a barrier between them and that body of literature with which it is most essential that they should be brought into frequent and prolonged contact. If, finally, written tests must be set in order not to disturb too violently the school machinery, why should it not be understood that all examinations in literature would be graded on the interest, diligence, and general intelligence shown by the pupil, and on his ability to write correct English, rather than on his knowledge of facts about literature, except as regards that unknown minimum of instruction about which a word will be said later? Such examinations would supplement those given in English composition, would throw fresh light upon the character and mental attainments of each pupil, and would assist in the determination of all questions relative to advancement. They would also furnish those ocular evidences of a pupil's immaturity or unwillingness to apply himself that are so needed by teachers whenever their decisions are disputed.

But the third sort of test mentioned a few moments ago remains to be considered—the test furnished by the writing of frequent essays. This is a favorite test with some teachers, and is doubtless successful when the pupil has an aptitude for writing. But that aptitude is comparatively rare, and I am not sure that essay-writing is not nearly or quite as bad for most young peo-

ple as rigid examinations in literature are likely to be. In this particular I fear I am a grievous heretic. Neatly written essays are such gentlemanly and ladylike things—especially when they are tied with ribbons. I always feel as if I were highly honored when a nice young man or woman presents me with the product of many hours' study and creative energy, particularly when it is typewritten and of moderate length. When the writer is a person of some maturity, a graduate student who has done either a small or a large amount of individual research, I always examine the essay with pleasure, both because I very frequently learn something I am glad to know and because I feel that I may be of service in directing a bent for study which I presume to exist from the fact that the graduate student has taken the trouble to enter as a candidate for a higher degree.

But for the school or college essay used as a test of literary work rather than as a test of work in English composition, I must confess I have very little respect. I fear that it encourages smattering, that it stimulates juvenile conceit, that it tends to crystallize tastes and opinions at an age when every effort should be made to widen and lend flexibility to the mind, that it leads to unconscious plagiarism and to a complacent habit of airing one's commonplaceness and fatuity. I wish to avoid seeming extreme, but I must say that American schools and colleges have in my judgment set far too high a premium upon essay-writing. I gather from some remarks of Mr. Frederic Harrison that this has been done in England also, and I am glad that in Mr. Harrison I find at least one sharer of my pessimistic views with regard to the future of a race that is encouraged from its earliest youth to write itself down with Dogberry. I have no quarrel, of course, with the theme or essay employed as a means to improve a student's use of his mother tongue; I have no quarrel with it employed as a means to develop the critical powers and the literary tastes of students who in one way or another have given evidence of aptitude for the study of letters; I have no quarrel with the essay or written report used moderately in connection with classes in literature, especially in universities. What moves me to wrath is our national

habit of requiring graduation theses of Harry and Lucy, no matter whether they want to write them or not, and of insisting that they inflict them upon adult audiences. I am also moved to pity—perhaps I show only my own folly in it—when I see teachers loaded down with bundles of essays on literary topics which they have conceived it to be their duty to demand from every member of their classes. I cannot help believing that nine out of ten of those essays give no real evidence of any higher power than that of extracting jejune information from encyclopedias and the essays of other people. The tenth, perhaps, gives evidence of something better; but cannot the teacher find out this tenth student without making the other nine dish up hebdomadal hashes of platitudes?

Any teacher who will not encourage and guide any student honestly desirous of learning how to write upon literary topics is unworthy of the name of teacher. Any man of letters who does not remember that he was once a neophyte himself, and gladly give what help he can to a competent young man or woman purposing to enter upon a literary life, is unworthy of the standing he has obtained. But the teacher or man of letters who encourages every one, regardless of natural aptitude, to write literary essays upon every possible occasion seems to me to be doing little good either to the individual encouraged or to the cause of education. If the amount of time spent by average school children and college students upon consulting encyclopedias and compiling essays were devoted to good reading, I fancy that the cause of culture would be greatly subserved. I would give every child the chance to develop whatever faculty it may have for writing, just as I would give it the chance to develop its presumptive faculty for drawing, for music, and for the other arts—but I think that this should be done by the teacher of composition, who can easily call in the teacher of literature to lend his aid should the case seem to require it. For the teacher of literature, however, to divert his energies from his greatest task of inculcating a love of wide reading to inculcating in Tom, Dick, and Harry a desire to see themselves in print or to hear themselves on a commencement platform is to me at least

a most questionable procedure. And surely the mere knowledge amassed by the essay writer does not compensate for the injury that may be done him in the ways I have mentioned.

Perhaps I ought to give two experiences I have had in this connection that will help to explain the strong language I have employed. I shall not soon forget the disgust I felt when an old teacher of mine—a most admirable man in many ways—once told his class complacently how he had won a prize of fifty dollars for an essay on Chaucer. He had never read a line of that great poet, but he took “Poole’s Index,” read up his subject in various magazine articles, and was clever enough to win the prize. He told us that story with pride, and practically said to each one of us, “Go thou and do likewise.” It seemed to me that although he had not cut off his hand before writing that essay, he ought to have cut out his tongue before boasting about it. Yet how much smattering and intellectual dishonesty similar to his have been fostered in this country by the givers of prizes, the assigners of essays, the conductors of literary clubs!

My second experience was more amusing and less nauseating. I used, years ago, to be pestered by a worthy but very immature student to give him bibliographies that would help him to write essays on Dante, Petrarch, and other great poets of whose works I knew that he had never read a line. The same student was acting as private secretary to a friend of mine, and, whenever his employer went out, this youthful essayist would go to the front door and hail passers-by with the request that they would spell for him words of two or more syllables that occurred in the letters he had to typewrite. I am not, I believe, niggardly of my time where students are concerned, but the incursions of that young man into my study for books on Italian literature, when he should have asked to borrow a Webster’s Spelling Book, tried my patience sorely. I have never since been able to view with equanimity the wholesale writing of essays.

Now a word in conclusion with regard to that unknown minimum of knowledge of literary history and biography, and of metrical, rhetorical, and linguistic facts, that a Fresh-

man should probably possess on entering college. My language here must be very tentative, for I must confess that the topic is one that has long puzzled me sorely. As for the metrical, rhetorical, and linguistic facts, it would be a comfort to rely for instruction in them on the teacher of English composition. As for the literary history and biography, it would be a comfort to rely on the teacher of history proper; for literature is a part of culture-history, and we must sooner or later wake up to the fact that political and military history should not monopolize the attention of school children. But I doubt whether the teachers of history and of composition will care to have their labors greatly increased, and I suppose we must blunder along until some one writes us a common sense "Introduction to the Study of Literature" in which this minimum of positive knowledge is conveyed in an agreeable fashion. When such a textbook is written, many of us will doubtless be willing to sing our *Nunc Dimittis*.

But I have promulgated heresies enough for one paper. I have frankly stated my belief that the time devoted to spiritual inculcation and to æsthetic training is of far more importance than that devoted to instruction in the facts of literature, and I draw hence the conclusion that we teachers of literature ought bravely to say to our fellow-teachers something like this: "We can, if we please, make our examinations as rigid as you do yours, but we do not believe that our facts are as important as yours, or at any rate can be acquired with so much advantage to our pupils. We wish to grade and advance our pupils on more flexible lines than you adopt, because we believe that the nature of our subject makes such flexible lines advisable. We believe that both the subject we teach and the subjects you teach are necessary to a catholic education; but that, while we are contributing to the same end as you, our means must be different from yours."

Some such appeal, accompanied by friendly discussion, will I am sure, in time satisfy every intelligent person that no harm to school discipline will be done if the teaching of literature finally resolves itself into little more than securing a wide amount of reading from children during their school years.

It will, I trust, in time satisfy the colleges that the examinations they now hold on selected English classics are more or less useless and should be abandoned. Finally, I trust that the study we must all give to the problems connected with the teaching of literature will sooner or later lead us—I will not say to become teetotalers with regard to our national dissipation in essay-writing—but at least moderate in our use of that seductive form of mental titillation. When I see young ladies and gentlemen armed with their numerous and formidable essays, I am irresistibly reminded of the young woman who drank so many cups of tea that the elder Mr. Weller was compelled to exclaim that she was “a swellin’ wisely.” I seem to see the young lady and gentleman essayists “swellin’ wisely” with mental pride. Let us have fewer new bad essays written and more good old books read.

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